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A lifespan perspective on multi-professional musicians: does music education prepare classical musicians for their careers?

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ABSTRACT

Many professional musicians would describe their careers as somewhat different to the careers they imagined when they were students. This study sought to understand the relationships between musicians' higher music education experiences and their professional work, and to expose the adaptive strategies they employ to sustain their work. The researchers amassed in-depth career narratives from eight musicians who were highly respected international performers. The musicians were also 'multi-professional' musicians in that they were recognised as highly proficient in multiple different roles. Narratives were analysed using selection, optimisation and compensation (SOC) theory. The results suggest that essential professional capabilities should be emphasised in the core curriculum of higher music education. A novel finding is that musicians who identify themselves as learners may be better able to create and sustain a career in music.

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Introduction

A growing international research corpus presents compelling evidence that when performers graduate from higher music education, the career imagined as students is vastly different to the career realised as emerging professionals (Bennett and Bridgstock 2015). Of the many thousands of music performance students who graduate every year, very few are employed in a full-time performance role (Beeching 2010; Bennett 2008; Perkins 2012). Moreover, many graduates leave the profession knowing little about the breadth of career opportunities in music (Bennett 2012; Myers 2016; Pike 2017).

There no longer any dispute that musicians need myriad capabilities beyond performance if they are to create and sustain a career. Noting that it can take multiple attempts to become established in music, Bennett and Bridgstock (2015, 274) emphasise that the struggles encountered by many graduate musicians can include 'enforced entrepreneurship, multiple roles, the need to build and run a small business, finding their niche, and the need to retain and refine their technical skills even when undertaking other work'. UNESCO (1998) adds that whilst it is important to provide high-quality, specialist education for aspiring musicians, institutions and policy makers have an ethical responsibility to understand musicians' professional work and to equip students to shape their future lives in music. This includes their development as agents of social change (Grant 2019) and as agentic learners (see Bennett 2019; Dweck and Master 2012; Vosniadou 2013; Zimmerman and Schunk 2012).

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The matter of how to develop musicians' graduate capabilities, however, involves a complex web of motivation, time, educational systems, vocational concerns, and long-held perceptions of success. Pike (2019) and Reid, Bennett, and Rowley (2019) advocate the value of exposing students to the music industry in professional and community contexts where they can cooperate with professionals with the added support of their institutions (see also Ascenso, McCormick, and Perkins 2019). This exposure also informs the curricular and attitudinal changes needed to develop learners' resilience O'Neill 2019) and prepare graduates to address societal demands and cultural challenges (Latham and Ewing 2018; Myers 2016). Similarly, scholars including Schleicher (2012) note that higher education should encompass greater awareness of diversity alongside personalised learning opportunities.

To develop career awareness among emerging musicians, Durrant (2005, 89) proposes broad graduate attributes which include 'philosophical underpinning, music-technical skills and interpersonal skills', while Berger (2019) adds the need for transformational leadership, transcultural understanding, creativity, and awareness of the contexts within which music work takes place. Other scholars advocate the inclusion of networking (Bennett and Burnard 2016) and critical thinking (Dylan Smith 2015). Deliege and Wiggins (2006) note that aspiring musicians also need to explore multiple genres, improvisation and compositional practices (see also Burnard 2013), which Sarath et al. (2014) agree are rarely prioritised in music curricula.

A common element of these approaches is that they emphasise the metacognitive dimensions of career development learning in music (Bennett 2016; Hatton and Smith 1995) through which students might disrupt their dominant thinking and take a more curious and learning-based approach to their development as musicians and more broadly as professionals and social citizens. The Association of European Conservatoires agrees that more holistically conceived curricula might overcome 'surprisingly common' approaches that are 'almost damaging [to a] student's development as a thoughtful and well-rounded musician' (Cox 2007, 12). This might herald a return to the multi-professional musician of earlier centuries: 'multi-professionals' who are recognised as highly proficient in multiple different roles (see Sarath, Myers, and Campbell 2017). It might also foster a holistic approach to higher music education that is at odds with the priorities of many institutions (Burland 2015; MacNamara, Holmes, and Collins 2008).

Multiple institutions have sought to transform the structure, content and pedagogical approaches within higher music education, often balancing institutional prestige with the demands of the graduate labour market, broader university and policy and funding measures, and the needs of both students and faculty. Hence, this article is framed within the studies which seek to achieve transformative professionalism (Hargreaves 1994) in music and the wider reconstruction of learners' identities both as musicians (Hargreaves, MacDonald, and Miell 2009; Reid et al. 2011) and across higher education in general (Whitchurch 2012), by putting learning sciences (Swayer 2015) at the service of artistic growth and education.

Theoretical framework

Much of the career-related research in music education has focussed on the needs of aspiring and emerging musicians. This study reports the analysis of testimonies from eight classically trained musicians based in Europe who were working as multi-professionals. The testimonies take the form of career narratives on creative work and adaptive processes across the career lifespan. We sought to answer two research questions:

- (1) How do professional musicians describe the relationships between their higher music education experiences and their professional work?
- (2) What concerns or changes do musicians describe and what adaptive strategies do they employ in order to sustain their work?

Lifespan development perspectives assume that patterns of change occur throughout the career lifespan and that people adapt by using multiple adaptive processes including acquisition, maintenance, transformation and attrition. In lifespan theories, adaptation is a pro-active process involving self-regulation as individuals negotiate situations such as goal success or failure, or changes in environment and resources.

The lifespan theory of selection, optimisation and compensation (SOC theory – see Baltes and Baltes 1990; Baltes and Dickson 2001; Boyd and Bee 2015) consists of three adaptive strategies with which individuals align their existing resources and resource demands to facilitate effective functioning, adaptation and development. The three SOC strategies can be summarised as follows:

- *Selection*: the selection of goals and outcomes that align with existing resources and resource demands;
- *Optimisation*: the allocation of efforts and resources to optimise performance; and
- *Compensation*: strategies to maintain the desired level of performance.

Bennett and Hennekam (2018) confirmed the potential for SOC theory to create meaningful, retrospective life-span perspectives with musicians. The musicians in Bennett and Hennekam's study used SOC strategies to maximise their resources, achieve goals and enhance wellbeing, but they used these strategies inconsistently, in combination, and in a non-linear fashion due to the non-linear nature of their music careers. For this study, we employed the SOC theory to identify the main adaptive processes employed by eight established musicians to navigate the music profession. To explain the processes, we employed the concepts of 'musicians' learner identity' and 'multi-professional musicians' to represent the adaptive concepts identified through the codification process.

Materials and methods

Recruitment and sample

Formal invitations to participate were sent to a target population of 15 multi-professional cellists. The cellists were classically trained in Western countries and respected internationally. The eight multi-professionals who agreed to participate reported diverse role combinations as international soloists, chamber musicians and orchestral musicians. Their roles included performing, conducting, composing, teaching, researching, running music festivals or businesses, and leadership positions in organisations or educational institutions.

Ethical approvals were obtained prior to the study and responses have been anonymised. Participation in the panel was remunerated following the expert lecture fee rates of the host institution. For the analysis, participants were grouped according to experience with mid-career musicians ($n = 5$) and late-career musicians ($n = 3$) having 10–25 years' and more than 25 years' experience respectively. The mid-career cohort included two women; the remaining participants were men.

Procedures

This was a descriptive, multiple-case study (León and Montero 2002) designed to elicit multi-faceted personal narratives about self and career. The eight musicians participated in an open panel on musicians' careers at a European higher music education institution. Following Lune and Berg (2016), the panel discussion was structured as a focus group interview. The 90-min discussion was conducted in English and video recorded in front of an audience consisting of music faculty and students, colleagues from other departments, faculty deans, and the general public.

The following guiding questions were designed to create a broad picture of the musicians' creative work, education and professional learning.

- (1) Did your music education prepare you for your career?
 - (a) What was particularly useful?
- (2) To what extent is a diversity of professional roles encouraged in higher music education?
- (3) How does your career differ from what you had expected?
- (4) What is the biggest mistake you have made in your career?
- (5) What else, apart from high-quality music skills, is needed to be employable?
- (6) What does it take to create a career in music?

Analysis

Open questions were analysed using content analysis via ATLAS.ti software version 8, which enabled the systematic and replicable compression of text into fewer content categories alongside inspection of the data for recurrent instances. Consistent with Strauss and Corbin (1990), both authors were involved in the inductive analysis of participants' testimonies using open coding prior and subsequent to independently crosschecking via axial coding to ensure validity. After this, inter-coder agreement was calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha, which was favourably calculated as .806. The authors then proceeded with a selective coding in which they reached a theoretical saturation through the SOC theory model.

Results

The findings are reported according to the themes which emerged from the data. Table 1 summarises the themes, grouped according to SOC strategy. We note that grammatical inconsistencies resulting from the panellists speaking in a second language were corrected within the quotes included in the article.

Selection

In SOC theory, selection relates to how people select goals and outcomes in line with their existing resources and their resource demands. All panellists emphasised that their resources were initially

Table 1. Participants' SOC strategies and the themes influencing their decision making.

SOC strategy	Themes
Selection	Finding a niche
	Happenstance: timing and 'luck'
	Hierarchical perceptions of success, focus on solo repertoire, competition
	Industry exposure
	Master-apprentice model of instrumental tuition
	Motivation: intrinsic learning, satisfaction and passion
Optimisation	Narrow focus of music education
	New learning
	Openness to new opportunities
	Ethical behaviour
	Artistic diversity
	Knowledge and experience
Compensation	Critical thinking and reflection
	Attrition from study
	Curiosity
	Determination
	Enterprising mindset
	New learning and the transfer of skills and knowledge to new contexts
	Redefining success
	Technical proficiency

limited by the *narrow focus of music education*; moreover, the impact was felt across the career life-span. Mid-career musicians were particularly critical about the focus on solo repertoire and the classical music canon, both of which were linked to a master apprentice approach in which process is ‘inherited’ by, or ‘built in’ to the practice of successive generations.

For soloist studies my education was very good, but we mostly played traditional classical repertoire and practiced ... this is built in to us, because the teaching we receive to learn the craft of our instrument is mostly through the canon repertoire.

However, the musicians also accepted the importance of dominant classical forms as seen in the following quote.

I was very much exposed to tradition and knowledge of the basic classical string music repertoire when playing in a string quartet in higher education ... this was a great experience.

They also acknowledged the expertise of their instrumental teachers.

... it was really good to study the craftsmanship of the cello with all those well-known teachers with great experience, and particularly being surrounded by high-level students/colleagues – that was very inspiring-

... fantastic classrooms, rather highly trained teachers, very experienced and so on.

The musicians recounted that their performance training was largely isolated from the professional world. This made it difficult to benchmark themselves against industry standards and it limited their opportunities to build the networks on which much music work depends.

I would have liked to have a little bit more of an integral education ... it has taken me a long time to make the right connections ... I didn't have enough chances to perform as a professional when I was a student; we only had the one recital a year, when you were graded with 10 points or less, and that was it.

The late-careerists' selection strategies had also been negatively impacted by the narrow focus of their music education and this impact was still felt in late career: ‘I think almost every week about how much happier I would be if I could have had more solid theoretical background’. Again, musicians were critical of the master-apprentice model:

The lessons were very much giving a model: ‘I play like this’. Even if the teaching was not so direct, the expectation of how the results should be was pre-decided: nobody wanted to hear surprises ... if I think about my trajectory as a student, I was disappointed that it was premised on copying existing models. ... When it was exactly as teachers wanted to hear, they were very pleased: ‘very good’. This is not a form of art for me, it is a form of copying something.

Of interest, the late career musicians had also observed how something new or pioneering can become a ‘form of copying’ over time.

There were the radicals who were the pioneers ... they started to be totally different than anybody else, but then they wanted to canonise their own style: ‘It has to be different (from the French *inégalité*) here. No, it is not the *right* style of difference here: we need *this* type of difference!’

Hierarchical perceptions of success in music were mentioned by all the musicians, who discussed the impact of this on their creative development. Again, creative autonomy was restricted.

The competition was so hard that we were forced to practice and perfect our [solo] skills in a much narrower field. There was much less room for, ‘I’m going to try this, I’m going to try that, I’m going to be with that person, or to improvise’, because you had to simply deliver a certain thing.

Late-career musicians also talked about the focus on solo repertoire and its negative impact on their ability to create and sustain their careers. This related to their ability to *find their niche* through the exploration of different career pathways and roles.

... education did not prepare me for my musician career ... The communication of art in the highest form was just us playing the cello, as it was taught.

The musicians emphasised the importance of *industry contact* and recommended

... more projects that cooperate with cutting-edge new musicians and electronic artists, just to show students what is going on in the scene – then they can decide if they want to take that path or not.

One musician noted that limited exposure to industry had led to narrow perceptions of success and, later, to a crisis of identity.

When I was young ... I was dreaming about competitions and the ranking for exams. This was introduced to me by my older brother, who won an international competition ... I thought that could be very cool, although he said, 'Bro', that's nothing'. Later, I remember a teacher who said, after winning a competition, 'you work so hard to win a competition, and it's really nothing: it gives you very little. But it's nice to win'. And very soon ... I started to think about winning something and repeating the same pieces all my life, you know, for 50 years, and it started to look more like a nightmare! That was a real crisis for me.

All panellists framed their career *motivation* in terms of following their passion: 'Go for your dream if you have one: better to try than to regret it later!' They also noted the importance of lifestyle and family, which for some musicians came into view when their successful performance careers demanded more and more travel.

I noticed that I want to have a family and I don't like the hotel life ... You need a special type of personality to do it.

The need for agility was seen in musicians' ability to adapt to changing internal and external circumstances. This extended to observations that the music labour market is increasingly overcrowded.

When I was starting my professional studies, at age 16, 50 students were offered to me. ... there were two or three applicants going for auditions to the orchestra, and none of them necessarily able to play at a high standard. ... If I was starting now from point zero, it would be very different.

Optimisation

In SOC theory, optimisation relates to how people optimise their performance by strategically allocating their efforts and resources. The most common optimisation strategy was *new learning*, which occurred mostly outside the formal education context.

[The highlight of] my Erasmus exchange in Paris was to learn and experience the whole cultural world there. ... This was essential for me to learn my musicianship: who I am and what do I want to do, wish to do, and where I stand in this musical field, and what I want to become.

Some of the new learning was both exploratory and transformative.

During my study years abroad, I took part in classes meant for dancers and actors ... this had very interesting links to the use of the bow hand, for instance in cello playing ... music we play is done with the body and the instrument. To make this connection between body and the instrument – I had some very revelatory experiences there – was massively useful.

Other musicians spoke of the difference between undergraduate and graduate-level studies, with one musician sharing:

At the doctoral level of studies, which for me is the starting point of knowledge and understanding ... I have learnt basically analytical skills, understanding the context of music in relation to other arts, and many things which have been incredibly useful.

One musician reflected that the quality of both teaching and facilities had changed markedly when he returned to study after a long period of time.

The teachers we had then started to be considerably much better than before, and the craft of the instrument – overall technical proficiency – was rising at incredible speeds. The resources for studying developed too (classrooms, performance spaces) compared to the previous generation.

The need to learn extended to a range of practical career concerns.

A musician needs technical talent but also needs personality and an incredible amount of luck and help, for you cannot ever do it alone. I know very, very few people who can say that they are successful exactly the way they wanted to be.

I don't think I had any idea how so much of the time, just purely practically speaking, goes to other things ... practical things, administrative things, tax things, changing the diapers, worrying about money, all the other things that are not related to creative art.

Another aspect of optimising their resources was to uphold *ethical behaviour*. Two panellists spoke of ethical behaviour in teaching, with one musician sharing how he had learned from his own unethical behaviour.

Beyond technical mastery and experience as a professional cellist, one thing that should be encouraged is emotional support for students, because nobody told me that there is bullying between students and also from teachers to students.

We are doomed to repeat the models, so when I was tired or something, my former professor was coming through me to crash people: not the good ones who learnt to play, but those who didn't learn. It's ugly and it's morally wrong, and it's totally unnecessary to hurt other people. That was a big mistake and there is no excuse.

The musicians also emphasised the importance of upholding professional values when interacting with colleagues. Again, one musician relayed his own experiences.

Don't be an asshole! A couple of times, I might have been an asshole and that never goes down well. You can be an asshole, but they never call you again.

The women in the mid-career group added that unethical behaviour can be *gendered*.

Some teachers mentioned I don't have enough power to play the cello because the cello is a male instrument. These kinds of things, when you are dealing with teenagers or post-teenagers, are a serious matter.

The next aspect of optimisation concerned the need to be artistically diverse. This is aligned with professional learning in that it demands a broad and agile musical skillset. It also relates to the *critical thinking* needed to optimise resources.

Most of the music I deal with now is rooted in the tradition of the avantgarde, so a lot of the time when I work, I need to, in fact, distance myself from the traditional values that one learns in conservatoires.

I don't see diversity in how the Dvorak [cello] concerto is played nowadays. ... Why should I listen to it once again? ... competition is somehow standardising the playing ... it has to be a meaningful performance for me and also for the audience that comes to listen to me. And I don't see that this is possible without diversity.

Being *open to new opportunities* was an aspect of optimisation presented particularly by the late-career musicians, one of whom asserted that 'it is very important to do whatever gives you possibilities to work as a musician in the future'. A second musician aligned openness with the need to challenge perceived hierarchies of success.

... there is still this thinking that becoming the international soloist is the highest form of musicianship, and those who are lucky enough to have that kind of personality don't need anything else. I don't think that this is ever the case. Everybody needs to be curious about everything ... whether that is the happiness of teaching young children to play cello, or writing your own music and being a singer songwriter, or ... being a famous international soloist. All of these are possibilities, but they are not possible for one person. Every one of us should be able to find themselves happy in one of these different possibilities.

Compensation

In SOC theory, *compensation* relates to the strategies people use to counteract or avoid losses. All eight panellists mentioned the importance of practising to maintain their technical proficiency and remain active as performers. This was sustained by being both *curious* and *determined*:

Curiosity and enthusiasm, especially for a freelance musician. You need the courage to execute ideas, a concert or projects, and also understanding of how the funding works.

Two of the late-career career musicians mentioned that they had abandoned their initial music career aspirations in search of creative autonomy and exploration. One musician aligned this with his inability to imagine the possibilities of a career in music.

Because of these traditional studies and the importance of nonsense competitions, I had a crisis and ... [thought] I could have done something more interesting for myself. But then, out of curiosity, I started to play another instrument and style. Back then, I didn't have any dreams ... I was dreaming that I could play a recital, but I didn't expect this kind of [career], you know: many countries and over a thousand recitals. That was beyond the imagination.

Curiosity was encapsulated within an *enterprising or pioneering mindset*; this was fundamental for all eight musicians, as seen in the examples below.

In the early music scene it is obvious that there is not a ready-made path for us to follow, so we have to somehow take all the chances there are and make our own path. I have worked for two years as Assistant Principal of a music institute, where it is possible to bring even more of my ideas to life and make a realistic living ...

If I think about diversity myself, it's very much that the world is open ... we are, however, stuck here, thinking that the musical world is shaped like our instrument! ... That's the spirit of the baroque: they were inventing instruments and some of them were, like, 'Okay, we failed here so let's make something else.'. If we end up in the wrong place, I do not think it's ever too late to open up some other field that can take you elsewhere, that can inspire you.

Most of the musicians engaged in new learning or transferred their skills and knowledge to new contexts in line with changing interests and resource needs. One of the musicians was studying conducting as he had formulated 'another goal in music education at the late age of 37'. Other panellists had experienced an enforced transition from performance as the result of physical pain or injury.

I had very bad pain in my back. I somehow thought, 'Well, I have to take the medicine and try to cope'. I would not do it now: there are plenty of years we can play, and it is best to cope with your living and do it right.

A final and crucial aspect of compensation, mentioned by all eight musicians, concerned their *redefinition of success* in line with their personal and professional values. In the second of these quotes, the musician sets a challenge for educators to 'talk about the industry' in a radically different way.

About 10–15 years ago, I changed my point of view. I decided to look at music and art as a personal quest that has nothing to do with competing against others ... That has made me much more successful and happier than I thought I would become.

I think if an institution gives in to the demands of certain teachers who think that all we need is to practice 10,000 h on our instrument, the institution is making a mistake. We need much more to have a happy life. We might be able to win a competition, or two, or three, but then, at some point when you are in your thirties, you come to the situation where it is not enough. There are going to be so many other competition winners coming right after you and taking your jobs, and if one of them happens to have more curiosity than you, that person is likely to take your place.

I don't like the way we are meant to talk about the music industry and measure success with the number of CDs, the number of reviews and the names of the orchestras and concert halls. Those are just signs of a certain kind of success, but they are available for so few and they are also things that ... can get away from you in one week. And then you are standing on nothing, on air.

Discussion

Our first aim in this article was to explore how multi-professional, classically trained musicians describe the relationships between their higher music education experiences and their professional work. The musicians described a narrowly focussed and relatively isolated experience characterised by a focus on the Western musical canon, a transmission mode of delivery (Burwell, Carey, and

Bennett 2017; Gaunt and Westerlund 2013; López-Íñiguez and Pozo 2014a, 2014b) and the master-apprentice model of instrumental learning (Burwell 2016; Gaunt 2011; Jørgensen 2000). They also noted a focus on competition (Doğnatan-Dack 2015) and a perceived hierarchy of careers in which solo careers were seen to be the pinnacle of success (Burland and Pitts 2007; MacNamara, Holmes, and Collins 2008). This thinking continued into profession life as an unquestioned determination to establish a solo career.

Despite their international success as performers, none of the musicians described a career in which a soloist role was dominant (see also Juuti and Littleton 2012). Neither did they limit their performance work to the canonic repertoire, finding that there is ‘more to *musicking* than that’. Rather than status competition, the musicians’ motivation stemmed from their enjoyment of the *processes* inherent in music making and the *learning* inherent in those processes (see Hallam and Gaunt 2012; Gaunt and Westerlund 2013; López-Íñiguez and Pozo 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Westerlund 2008).

In line with the ‘living curriculum’ concept proposed by Bath et al. (2004), the musicians emphasised the importance of curiosity and intrinsically motivated reinforcement learning (Barto, Singh, and Chentanez 2004). This concept has previously been acknowledged in accounts of music professionals’ transitions into the professional world (Burland and Davidson 2017; Devries 2000; López-Íñiguez 2019a; Smilde 2009). In this study, intrinsically motivated reinforcement learning extended across the entire career lifespan through an assertion that successful careers in music are intrinsic and process oriented.

We acknowledge that lifelong learning is a necessary component of a music career and not simply a matter of preference. The point here is that the musicians expressed their goals not as achievement goals, but as a process of discovering ‘what we are not’ (Reay 2010, 2). This distinction illustrates that musicians’ learner identity is a crucial aspect of their motivation and growth across the career life-cycle (see Dweck and Masters 2012; López-Íñiguez et al. *in press*; Zimmerman and Schunk 2012). Musicians’ ‘functional identity’ emerges as a mediator in the processes of meaning construction and significance attribution within formal *situated* learning experiences, and also a *trans-situational* mediator when exposed to both formal and informal multiple, complex learning situations throughout the career lifespan (Coll and Falsafi 2010).

The discovery and exploration of their learner identity had led the musicians in our study to seek additional learning opportunities outside of their formal music instruction even whilst they were in the pre-professional stage. This has a practical implication in that by exposing themselves to authentic, extra-curricular learning opportunities, the musicians learned from both their successes and failures (in line with Woody 2004). This led them to acquire advantageous skills, knowledge and experience. It led also to moments of transformation which informed their career decision making and enabled them to prioritise activities with personal meaning and which connected their musical, professional and personal identities.

The second aim of this article was to understand the adaptive strategies employed by musicians to ameliorate career-related concerns or changes. We note that the musicians managed a portfolio of roles to sustain their financial and creative wellbeing (Bartleet et al. 2019). Again, the common feature across all eight musicians was that they embraced the idea of discovering new aspects of music making and career. In line with their intrinsically motivated learner identity whilst students, the musicians approached their careers as curious musicians who seek professional opportunities, take informed risks, adopt a pioneering attitude and nurture their relationships by upholding appropriate ethical behaviour. The result was a breadth and depth of career possibilities which exceeded their expectations.

Conclusions and recommendations

We begin by acknowledging the study’s limitations. First, the sample was deliberately narrow in scope, consisting of established European musicians who had studied classical cello. Many higher music education institutions have embraced significant curricular and pedagogical change and we

note that the study experiences of our sample were largely in the past. However, all eight musicians were teachers and/or learners within higher music education and they asserted that more could be done to prepare aspiring musicians for professional life. Future studies might replicate the research with other ‘experts’ including early careerists. Studies with early careerists would be able to explore the curriculum and institutional culture that respondents had experienced as students. This might uncover career development opportunities in which the graduates had not engaged, and seek to ascertain why this was the case. Longitudinal studies which follow musicians’ transition from studenthood to professional life would shed light on this complex transition and inform strategies for developing learner identities in higher education. With this in mind, we highlight several implications for higher music education.

The first implication relates to the development of musicians’ learner identity, which is formed through pedagogic practices and constructed through a sense of ‘what we are not’ (Reay 2010, 2). In educational and professional learning contexts, the development of sense of self as an agentic learner is crucial to shaping personal rehearsal strategies and goal-pursuit. This type of learner identity goes beyond identifying the range of skills, knowledge and attitudes that may be important to success as a goal-oriented musician. Instead, it focusses on the learning processes and conditions which enable musicians to become agents of learning through conceptual change: in short, the metacognition which enables musicians to create and sustain meaningful work. This occurs by means of epistemic-ontological shifts in learners’ beliefs and practices towards music, thus fostering their development as autonomous, motivated and skilful agents of learning.

Next, we add to calls to limit the master-apprentice tradition of instruction such that the authority exercised by teachers in isolated classrooms is replaced by a reflexive approach to learning and musical growth (in line with Pozo et al. [in press](#)). This involves resisting the climate of standardisation created by competitions to create an environment of role exploration, experience and meaning making.

The third implication is the need for music educators to attend to the diversity of musicians by supporting personalised learning. The multi-professional nature of musicians’ careers was evident in the panellists’ adaptive musical and professional identities. These transformations are often critical or crossroads moments in musicians’ studenthood and professional lives. Moreover, they can cause turmoil and stress regardless of expertise or experience. Seen through the lens of SOC theory, preparing aspiring musicians for inevitable transformation awakens their interest in learning by engaging them in the metacognitive processes which will underpin their ability to navigate life as a musician.

Welch et al. (2008, 214) suggest that music’s gender and genre discourses have a significant influence on ‘musicians’ self-perceptions and attitudes towards music learning and teaching in higher education’. Deconstructing and making explicit the biases within music demands change within the curriculum and the practices of teachers and students. Targeted leadership, networking and critical thinking opportunities are likely to raise awareness of bias among all students and to help aspiring female musicians manage gender inequity and reorient entrepreneurship activities commonly stereotyped as ‘pushy behaviour’ (Scharff 2015).

Finally, institutions are encouraged to develop students’ social consciousness and agency by exposing them to broad industry and social contexts. These exposures can help aspiring musicians to develop broad and agile musician identities alongside the professional and community networks through which musicians manage their development and work. Much of this work occurs in higher music education already, but it could be brought from the co-curricular space into the core curriculum. Through such activities, the curriculum can examine the complex relationships between music making, work, society, and identity development in all its complexity: musical, social, personal, and as a learner.

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